

The New Power Couple: What Happen When She has the Fortune

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Introduction

This essay explores the evolving dynamics of modern marriage, particularly when the wife is the primary or sole source of wealth. Drawing on "The Sixth Level" framework, it unpacks the emotional and psychological toll outdated gender norms exert on relationships, especially among high-functioning couples.

The core assertion is that the relationship is not the problem – external social scripts are. By surfacing, naming, and replacing these scripts with a relational code of conduct grounded in mutuality, ingenuity, justness, and intrinsic motivation (the foundational pillars of The Sixth Level), couples can construct emotionally fulfilling partnerships that transcend traditional expectations and thrive in the face of complexity.

Current state

At a recent conference, a group of high net worth women were discussing how to navigate the dynamics in a relationship where the woman is the primary source of wealth. "It seems the more success I achieve, the more it creates an underlying tension. At a time when we should be thriving, I feel an undercurrent of jealousy and insecurity from my partner," stated Claire.

The tension in relationships like this one is not a flaw in either partner, but rather a signal that old norms no longer serve them. When couples recognize that the problem lies in the social expectations they've inherited – not in one another – they can begin to reengineer their dynamics. What emerges is often a more conscious, respectful, and fulfilling version of partnership – one based on possibility, partnership and care.

The number of women who earn equal or more to their partners has tripled over the past 50 years. In 1972, only 5 per cent of women were the sole or

primary breadwinner. That number has climbed to 16 per cent of households by 2022. As women moved into the workforce, the status quo of men being the primary breadwinner (nearly 50 per cent of households) five decades prior has shifted to less than a quarter of households supported solely by a male breadwinner.

Historically, wives of wealthy husbands have often felt that they were not included in money decisions, that there was a weak partnership, and that they felt low self-esteem. In that regard it may be no surprise that it may be the same for husbands of wealthy wives. Men, in general, can experience psychological distress related to their identification with masculine roles and expectations which are built on traditional gender norms. Societal shifts can challenge these norms and lead to feelings of being threatened.

Research suggests that men who conform to traditional masculine norms, particularly those related to the value of self-reliance, and having power over women may have higher rates of depression, anxiety, and stress. Husbands in marriages where women have significantly more economic power than their husbands can be deeply socially stigmatized, especially by other men.

This financial shift in the makeup of households has necessitated a need to recast our definitions of partnership and how we look at the impact of finances on power. That starts with exposing and naming the unspoken rules surrounding gender and power.

Whether the wife has earned wealth, family wealth or inherited wealth, the challenges and insights explored in this essay apply equally. The source of wealth does not alter the fundamental impact that entrenched social norms and expectations have on the marital dynamic. What matters most is how

couples understand and respond to these forces – together.

The silent strain: Navigating power in modern partnerships

Part 1: Impact of invisible norms

“I grew up in a family where men were taught to provide and protect their families. I never thought my value to provide would not be needed. If I’m being honest, I feel unimportant – even though I have a good business I started years ago. But compared to my wife’s wealth, it feels insignificant. Because of this, I don’t have a place in my marriage,” said Daniel.

Daniel and Claire are not alone. Wealth creates a unique set of power dynamics in any relationship – but when the financial majority resides primarily with the wife, traditional assumptions about masculinity and marriage are often exposed. In Daniel’s case, his identity as a husband and man is quietly eroded by the sense that his financial contribution is insignificant. It may further be enflamed by comments from peers like, “You sure married well.” Or “Do you need to ask your wife before you make that decision?”

In our interview, Claire saw it differently: “I fell in love with Daniel because of his work ethic, his love of family, and his strength. I respect him. I appreciate him. I want him to be my partner in managing the wealth we have and making decisions that impact each other and our family. I cannot understand what is holding him back.”

The emotional gap between them isn’t rooted in a lack of love or goodwill. It’s the result of invisible rules – norms that quietly shape how power and value are assigned in intimate relationships based on who is providing the lion’s share of wealth. It is more problematic when the main provider is the woman, although we acknowledge the solutions we suggest would work in cases where the situation is reversed, or where only one partner is providing financial support.

These norms are subtle, often unspoken. They whisper that husbands should be providers and protectors, and wives should be in need of being cared for. Even when we believe we have outgrown

these ideas, they persist in our subconscious and influence how we interpret our roles and each other. The stress this creates is real – and often unacknowledged. Daniel’s discomfort doesn’t stem from a lack of capability. It comes from the internal conflict between who he is and who he believes he’s supposed to be. In psychological terms, he feels diminished and, at times, infantilized, like his role has been quietly erased.

Many high-functioning men in this position experience a quiet crisis of identity. The pressure doesn’t come from their partners, but from a social script they’ve absorbed since boyhood.

This triad of male identity, the 3 Ps, as they are known – to Procreate, Provide, and Protect – is deeply entrenched. Gender studies scholar Michael Kimmel has written extensively on how these roles serve as benchmarks of manhood (Kimmel, 2008). Anthropologist David Gilmore’s cross-cultural research reinforces this, revealing that in nearly every culture, masculinity is measured through this very framework (Gilmore, 1990).

These academic frameworks help explain why highly competent, successful men can still feel powerless in their own marriages. It’s not about logic. It’s about the emotional weight of a role they were taught to embody.

Part 2: Redefining power and partnership

Even if Claire places no pressure on Daniel, the system does. He admits to feeling irrelevant in financial decisions, unsure how to assert himself, and quietly inadequate. Many men in similar situations mask their distress through overachievement or emotional withdrawal – grappling with a need to prove their worth in more traditionally masculine ways.

What makes this even more complex is that in elite social circles, patriarchy isn’t just present – it’s performative. Appearances matter. Roles are watched. And the subtle cues of status carry weight. When a man no longer fits the archetype of “provider,” he may start to feel diminished in the eyes of other men because he is not filling his societally prescribed part in the relationship. That belief – “I am not needed” – slowly chips away at his

sense of belonging and purpose, especially if there's no space to process or name what he's feeling. But this emotional complexity isn't a personal flaw. It's the inevitable result of a system that defines worth through outdated ideals.

Beyond the constraints of the 3 Ps toward something sustainable, healthy – like Partnership?

It starts with having the courage to speak openly about the invisible forces shaping committed relationships. By acknowledging the weight of these norms, couples can begin to reshape them – and build something more intentional in their place. Something rooted not in hierarchy, but in trust, shared power, and mutual value. Taking these intentional steps is at the heart of creating a strong relationship with anyone, but it is also highly effective in helping couples ignore the pressures of society and see the real picture.

These couples – whether they realize it or not – are challenging the status quo. In fact, Coventry Edwards-Pitt perfectly encapsulates the idea of a partner being “a gift, not a threat.” And “when couples get engaged, their partner may be one of the first people who sees them as their best self, as the adult they are becoming,” (Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise. 2023). They stand at a crossroads: either bear the weight of outdated norms or embrace the opportunity to design a new kind of marriage – one that reflects genuine partnership. This means discarding the model of control disguised as provision (like the lower-financial providing partner being given an allowance), and instead building a relationship that fuels growth, not diminishes it. It means valuing childcare as the essence of legacy, domestic responsibilities as the emotional architecture of a home, and most of all, seeing that central destination as a place that restores, protects, and energizes both partners.

This reimagining of partnership applies just as urgently to women who marry sole breadwinners or marry into wealth. These dynamics, too, must evolve –because true partnership demands it. Otherwise, you are always left with one partner feeling powerless and less significant to the relationship.

Finding a new path forward through emotional reciprocity

Claire and Daniel are at a crossroads in their marriage. They both know it's time to address the underlying conflict, but neither has a roadmap for how to begin. They agree to engage a consultant.

During their first meeting, Claire and Daniel shared some very profound and honest thoughts and feelings. They acknowledged each other's emotions and how that has impacted their relationship, which told the consultant that they could see the problem before them; they simply didn't know how to address it.

The consultant affirmed something simple yet profound: their willingness to show up for this process revealed that their relationship – and their family – was a priority. Then came a truth neither expected but both needed to hear: “Your problem is not each other. It's the societal pressure that makes you question your roles in the relationship.” Relief washed over them. The fear they had carried into the room – that the session would expose them as hopeless or broken – dissolved. They leaned closer to each other in their chairs, their body language subtly signaling a shift in the dynamic.

“We're going to name and bring to light the outdated norms that have shaped how you feel,” the consultant continued. “Then we'll rename and redefine them –together. You'll build a roadmap based on the reality you choose, not the one imposed on you. Then, when external forces threaten to seep into your relationship, the two of you become the first line of defense. That makes each of you stronger together, and apart.” Hope stirred. A new sense of possibility began to emerge.

As Claire and Daniel leaned into the work, they discovered fractures in their foundation – hidden, unexpected, and far-reaching. Some of the breaks were subtle, others deep. What surprised them most was that these fractures had wounded them in different ways. But rather than being disheartened, they felt a kind of joy: the norms that had silently hurt them were finally being named – and that naming offered a path to healing.

A new code of conduct: relational

Claire and Daniel shifted out of feeling isolated and pitted against each other into a sense of coming together as one team. This one team of two people

brought forth the messages and feelings coming from the outside to each other. They stopped internalizing and ignoring the micro cuts that others would make about the roles they each played in their marriage and stood confidently in the supportive roles they were comfortable with and knew would support each other and their family.

It was not about having to overcome, but rather it was the gift of being able to recreate and rewrite a new narrative. Instead of “provide” and “protect,” instead of “insecure” and “unappreciated,” Claire and Daniel used the words of The Sixth Level to redefine the four principles that would become a Relational Code of Conduct, i.e., the framework of their relationship going forward:

- **Mutuality** is characterized by emotional reciprocity, where both partners are connected on their shared journey and make space for each other’s personal growth paths. In this environment, both partners feel supported and empowered to pursue their individual goals while remaining invested in the marriage’s shared future.
Mutuality might sound like: What can we do better so we both feel mutually supported and rewarded by our relationship? Am I allowing the norms of society to leak into my relationship and create dissent or am I addressing those issues head-on with my partner? Is one partner on an “allowance,” rather than being a completely mutual person in the relationship? How can we address that?
- **Ingenuity** is the capacity to pursue personal ambitions uniquely and authentically while respecting the opportunity the marriage provides. It is about embracing individuality and the freedom to evolve in ways that are true to oneself, while also contributing to the partnership’s shared aspirations.
Ingenuity might sound like: When we work as true partners and support each other – without second guessing – how might our family grow stronger, our children feel more secure, and our individual or family challenges be resolved more easily? Are there ways I can support my partner in what celebrates their individuality? For instance, intentionally carve out time for one

another’s passions in a supportive, not critical, way?

- **Justness** involves transcending natural hierarchies and allowing both partners to express their voices in shaping the future. In marriage, this means ensuring that decisions are made together, with mutual respect and understanding, so that both partners feel valued, heard, and responsible for shaping their future.
Justness might sound like: Who is feeling left out of the process, not heard, and how do we bring their voices into the fold? Have I made decisions in the past without consulting my partner (because of the financial power dynamic)? How can I handle that situation differently in the future? Are the books, so to speak, open between us?
- **Intrinsic Motivation** emerges when both partners are motivated by something beyond obligation – when they feel empowered and fulfilled by their shared life. In marriage, intrinsic motivation arises when both partners are authentically engaged in supporting one another and the shared goals of their life together, not just out of duty or expectation.
Intrinsic Motivation might sound like: How can we make decisions together that consider what we both need to feel good, and think beyond ourselves to improve the dynamics for the whole family? Maybe that’s something as simple as doing activities that regularly reinforce the priorities of the relationship.

The four core differentiators that make up the Relational Code of Conduct work synergistically to foster a balanced, healthy relationship where both partners thrive. In a marriage rooted in these principles, both partners align their ambitions with a shared purpose, building trust and respect while remaining true to their individual identities. Each partner’s personal growth is seen as an asset to the relationship, creating an environment where success becomes a shared experience, and mutual appreciation and love flourish.

Transcending the norms: Redefining identity and connection

Using the four principles of The Sixth Level, Claire and Daniel began to establish new guiding principles for themselves. Not only had they grown past the setback of struggling to fit into old norms, but they were also empowered to create better ones. What started as a source of continual underlying tension in their marriage had been transformed into a new freedom that promised lasting health for themselves and the next generation.

- **Co-Creating a shared identity:** Going forward, the couple should engage in honest dialogue about their individual roles and aspirations. This involves building a new narrative that honors both personal values and the inherited legacy. The husband can define himself in relation to his wife and their joint purpose, while the wife can redefine her identity in light of her financial contributions, distinguishing her personal ambitions from the established family dynamics.
- **Strengthening the relationship through connection:** Beyond the transactional aspects of wealth, the couple must invest in their emotional bond. Regular, open communication can help the husband assert his value and purpose as a man in the marriage and help the wife clarify her own identity as a woman independent of her family's expectations. And when the inevitable comments are made in various social circles like, "What's it like to be rolling in your wife's money," or "You don't even need to show up to work," the couple can get on brand with, "We don't roll that way," or "Your imagination is failing you." That kind of messaging not only demonstrates mutuality to each partner, but also to the outside world.
- **Navigating the larger system together:** The couple should find ways to remain connected to the extended family and broader social system while also carving out a unique space that is exclusively theirs. This might involve participating in family affairs on their own terms or establishing new traditions that reflect their shared vision.
- **Redefining success and contribution:** The husband can redefine what it means to him to

contribute – emphasizing qualities beyond financial provision – while the wife can challenge traditional dynamics by celebrating achievements not solely based on earned or inherited wealth. In other words, if money was no longer part of the equation, how would they define success and contribution? Answering that question can help them create a definition that feels more "We" than "Me," or even "The World." Together, they set a standard where mutual respect and personal fulfillment are prioritized over societal expectations.

Prognosis: A marriage built on the ethic of care

"The challenges of being a husband married to a wife as the main financial provider or breadwinner are real, but they do not have to be destructive," offered Bonnie Spears-McGrath, Tiger 21 Chair, an UHNW peer advisory network. She has seen firsthand that when invisible norms are surfaced and structural expectations are actively disrupted, couples can create a foundation of trust and respect instead of retreating to silent resentment.

By acknowledging and proactively managing these dynamics, husbands who marry into wealth or who marry women who are the main breadwinners can carve out roles that are both fulfilling and authentic, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to the family and society. Even more importantly, they can build a partnership rooted in shared goals, mutual respect, and the freedom – an Ethic of Care – to pursue personal and collective success on their own terms.

Conclusion: Transcending old scripts, shaping new futures

By recognizing the hidden dynamics wealth introduces – and addressing them through the lens of mutual emotional health and shared purpose – couples can evolve beyond performative norms.

Their example of shucking the old standards, or laughing off the judgment from the outside world, can serve as a role model in their family and community and help crush outdated societal norms. The Sixth Level offers a practical and emotional roadmap for doing just that: fostering a marriage where each partner is free to grow, contribute, and lead with integrity.

In this new paradigm, worth is not dictated by the percentage each contributed to the bank account – but by the courage, care, and character each partner brings to the relationship. The eye is always on the bigger prize – the relationship as a whole – rather than the bank balance. When both partners are willing to examine and dismantle old assumptions, wealth no longer distorts love – it deepens it.

The greatest value of wealth is its potential to strengthen family health and wellbeing – not by colluding with unsustainable norms, but by supporting a Relational Code of Conduct that fosters emotionally fulfilling relationships enriched, not distorted, by wealth.

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